



# School District Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Round 4, Halfway Through Closures

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May 2020

## Key Points

- This is the fourth report in the “School District Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic” series, covering changes that occurred in public school districts between April 14 and April 24, 2020.
- A bare majority of schools (51 percent) are now beyond the halfway point of scheduled closures—meaning they are now closer to the end of the school year than they are to the date in which buildings closed.
- For the first time, the estimated percentage of schools offering asynchronous forms of remote instruction exceeded the estimated percentage of schools offering instructional packets.
- Over half of schools rely mostly or wholly on online platforms to provide remote instruction, which is more than double the share of schools that rely mostly or wholly on packets or hard copy materials.

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When school buildings first closed in mid-March, few education leaders knew how long such closures would last. Now, that picture is becoming increasingly clear. Nearly all state governments have issued orders or recommendations requiring school buildings to remain closed for the duration of the 2019–20 academic year due to the threat of COVID-19.

In light of these closures, some schools, such as those in California, have suggested that they might extend the school year into the summer to make up for lost time in the classroom.<sup>1</sup> Other schools have chosen the opposite route, announcing they will end the school year early and focus all efforts on reopening in the fall.

The vast majority of schools, however, have not yet made decisions on these matters. Their current plan, as of late April, is to end the school year remotely on the original date that the school year was scheduled to end. In effect, the majority of schools are now beyond the halfway point of scheduled closures—meaning they are now closer to the scheduled end of the school year than they are to the date in which school buildings closed.

As schools enter the final leg in the academic year, we provide updated data on the state of America’s schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## AEI's COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey

C-ERLS was developed quickly amid the pandemic with the intention of being rapid, reliable, representative, and repetitive. The design allows us to gather data that paint a current picture of school and district efforts.

Data for this report were collected on April 23 and 24, and Table 1 lists the dates that previous rounds of data were collected. Information was gathered exclusively from school district websites (and pages linked to them) on the assumption that these sites are the centralized communication hub for most districts and that they yield current information with an assuredly high response rate.

We selected a nationally representative sample of 250 public school districts so the data would reflect the broader population of districts.<sup>2</sup> In total, this is just under 2 percent of all regular school districts in the country, providing information for 10,289 schools (roughly 11 percent of all public schools).<sup>3</sup>

Although the C-ERLS sample is at the district level, we gathered information about what those districts are offering across all their schools. Thus, we present results as percentages of all schools, which can be interpreted as the proportion of public schools<sup>4</sup> whose districts are offering a given program, platform, or service.

Some districts we sampled contain charter schools, many of which will not extend the programs and platforms presented on district websites. Our survey method does not account for these charter schools, which may bias the school-level estimates by small amounts. However, district-level estimates are presented in Appendix B.

Note the variance for this survey, with a margin of error of 6.1 percent, is relatively large, and even modest differences in estimates may not be statistically significant. Each wave of C-ERLS data will be publicly available on the AEI website in a modified spreadsheet that masks the identity of small districts (those with six schools or fewer), and the entire dataset is available upon request.<sup>5</sup> Additional details about the survey instrument, sampling design, and variable definitions are available on the AEI website.<sup>6</sup>

## Findings

This report documents how public school districts responded during the immediate aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis through April 24, the date of the most recent C-ERLS data collection (hereafter referred to as “Wave 4”).

We document many services that schools and districts provide through the pandemic, including meals, devices and technology, and internet access. We also examine the types and variety of remote educational services that schools offer, including worksheets, virtual supplemental content (such as Khan Academy), and directed online curriculum via synchronous and asynchronous platforms.

By late April, 95 percent of schools were providing meals to students, 62 percent were providing (or planning to provide) devices, and 67 percent were providing (or planning to provide) internet access. These percentages represent small increases since early April, when 94 percent were providing meal services, 57 percent were offering devices, and 62 percent were providing internet access.

At this point, nearly all schools are providing remote instruction. By late April, 94 percent of schools

**Table 1. C-ERLS Data Collection Dates**

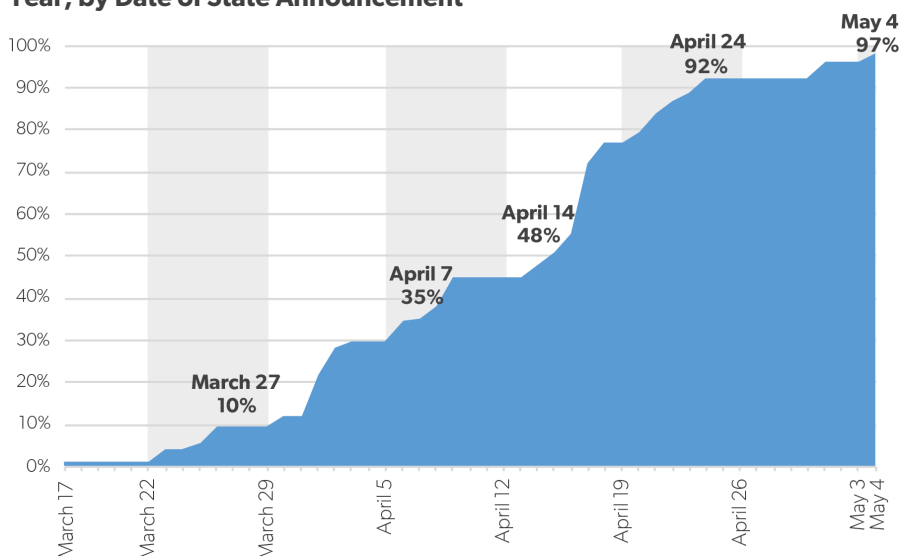
Wave	Date of Data Collection
1	March 26–27, 2020
2	April 6–7, 2020
3	April 13–14, 2020
4	April 23–24, 2020

Source: Authors.

were in districts with a remote instructional program in place. Remarkably, that is double the share of schools that offered remote instruction in late March. More than four in five schools use asynchronous platforms and worksheets as forms of remote instruction, and more than 40 percent of schools use synchronous platforms, such as Zoom or Google Hangouts, to engage with students. We discuss each area in more detail in the following subsections.

**Closures.** All schools in the sample were closed by late March, and all remained closed through April 24. The majority of closures occurred between March 16 and 18, either through districts’ own initiative or by statewide orders.

**Figure 1. Percentage of Public Schools Closed for the 2019–20 School Year, by Date of State Announcement**



Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," April 24, 2020, <https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/>.

At the time of the Wave 4 data collection, just 8 percent of schools had a date on their district website indicating plans to reopen buildings later in the 2019–20 school year. This is a dramatic decline from previous rounds of data collection. For comparison, on March 27, 82 percent of schools were in districts whose websites had tentative reopening plans, which declined to 68 percent on April 7 and then 47 percent on April 14.

This rapid decline was driven by state orders or recommendations for schools to remain closed for the academic year. Such orders covered nearly half (48 percent) of all public schools on April 14, and by April 24, these orders covered 92 percent of the nation's schools.<sup>8</sup> By May 4, which was after the date of our Wave 4 data collection, several additional states announced closure orders, bringing the percentage of schools closed for the remainder of the academic year to 97 percent. Figure 1 shows the share of schools affected by statewide orders and closure recommendations over time.

### Schools Halfway Through Pandemic Closure.

Many schools and districts are now beyond the halfway point of scheduled closures—meaning that schools are now closer to the scheduled end of the academic year than they are to the point in which buildings closed. As shown in Figure 2, just over half of schools were beyond the halfway point

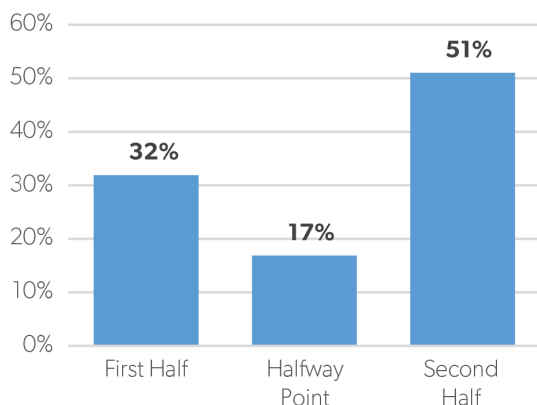
for closures by the date of the Wave 4 data collection.<sup>9</sup> Seventeen percent of schools had as many weeks ahead of them as had passed since closure (meaning they are currently at the halfway point), and 32 percent were still in the first half.

Fewer schools, however, are beyond the halfway point in providing remote instruction. In part, this is because more than four in 10 schools took three or more weeks after building closures to begin remote instruction (as reported in the Wave 3 report<sup>10</sup>). As shown in Figure 3, 65 per-

cent of schools were in districts that had more weeks of remote instruction remaining than had already occurred as of April 24. Sixteen percent were exactly halfway through their scheduled remote instruction, and 15 percent had completed more than half of their expected remote instruction—meaning that these schools are now closer to the end of the academic year than they are to the point in which remote instruction began.

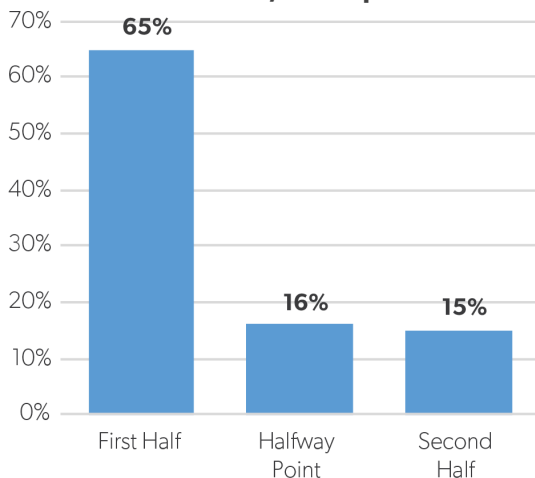
Schools varied substantially in how many weeks remained in this academic year. On April 24, more than one in four schools had four weeks or fewer remaining in the originally scheduled academic year, while 26 percent had six weeks remaining. (See Figure 4.) About 16 percent of schools had six, seven, or between eight and 10 weeks remaining. By April 24, a point when it might be hoped remote learning would be working more effectively than it had in the days it was first introduced, 6 percent of schools were in districts that decided to end their school year early, typically by two or three weeks. The districts that decided to end the school year early varied in how much time they had remaining, but regardless, the decision to close early removed a substantial proportion of the remaining potential teaching and learning students and parents might hope for this year.

**Figure 2. Schools Progress Through Period of Closure, as of April 24**



Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," April 24, 2020, <https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/>.

**Figure 3. Schools Progress Through Period of Remote Instruction, as of April 24**



Note: Four percent of schools are in districts whose websites indicate no instructional programs, which are excluded from this figure. Percentages are of all schools and thus sum to 96 percent. Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," April 24, 2020, <https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/>.

**Food Service.** Providing meals to students continues to be one of the top priority for schools—especially in districts where many students qualify for free and reduced lunch. By April 24, 95 percent of schools had plans on district websites for providing food to students, up from 82 percent of schools that were providing meals four weeks earlier.

The mechanisms of meal delivery have changed in ways that are consistent with efforts to promote social distancing safeguards. As shown in Figure 5, a majority of schools—60 percent—provide meals through daily pickup at school sites, a slightly lower percentage than in Waves 1, 2, and 3. Fifty-eight percent of schools allow students to pick up multiple days of food at once, which rose steadily from 45 percent of schools a month earlier. Thirty-two percent of schools were in districts that deliver meals to students' homes or at school bus stops (data not shown in Figure 5), which is also an increase since the first wave of data collection.<sup>11</sup>

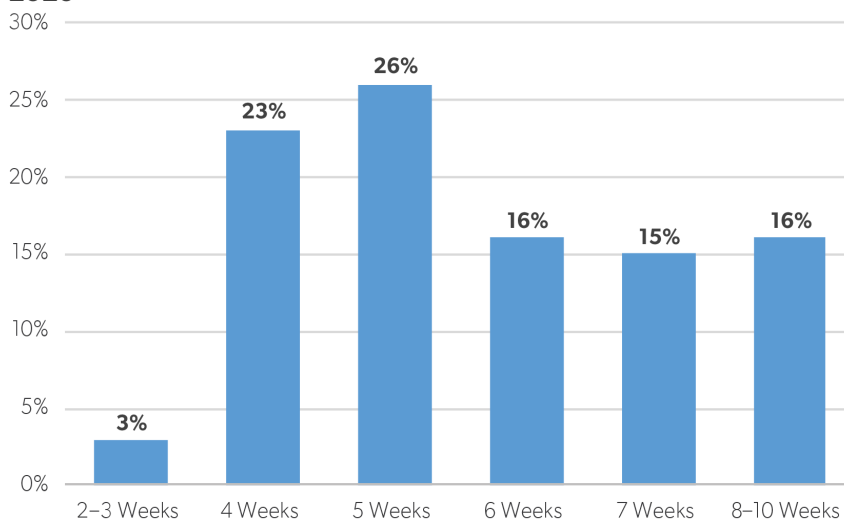
**Technology Assistance.** Ensuring that students have access to technology is a precursor to effective online instruction. Accordingly, many schools and districts now provide help for students without access to these technologies at home.

By April 24, 78 percent of schools were in districts that offered some kind of technology assistance to families. About 17 percent of schools were fielding a technology survey to determine students' needs. Sixty-seven percent of schools were in districts whose websites provided some assistance for students to access the internet. (See Figure 6.) Sixty-two percent of schools had a program to provide devices to students who did not already have them at home.<sup>12</sup> Twenty-seven percent of schools were in districts that had established a "help desk" that families could call for help solving problems accessing instructional platforms. Additional details on technology provisions are in Appendix A.

**Educational Programs.** By late April, 94 percent of schools were in districts that had some sort of education program or offering available, up from 81 percent in Wave 3, shown in Figure 7.<sup>13</sup> As we have previously noted, individual schools or teachers may have offered educational resources through school websites, email, direct contact, or an open-access asynchronous platform, and our data collection might not have captured these efforts.<sup>14</sup> A small share of districts in our sample, including just 4 percent of schools, had not posted concrete plans for providing any remote education for students by April 24.

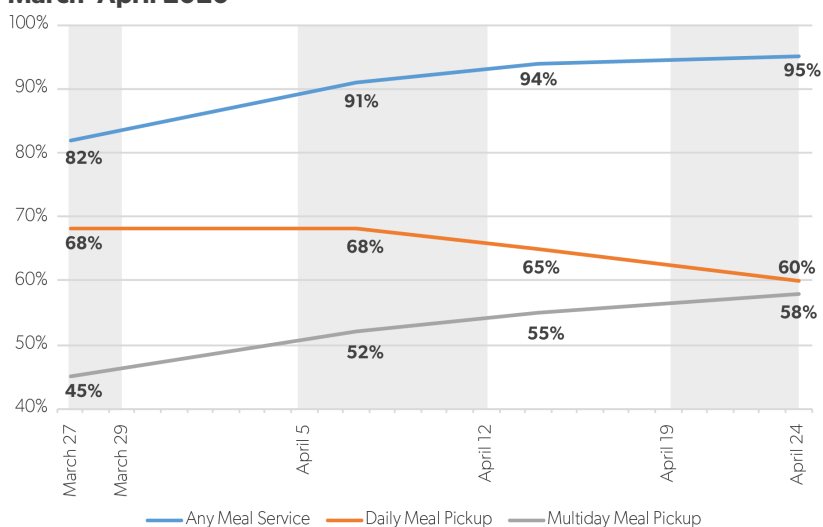
There was a wide spectrum of educational provisions in districts offering remote instruction,

**Figure 4. Remaining Weeks of Remote Instruction, as of April 24, 2020**



Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," April 24, 2020, <https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/>.

**Figure 5. Share of Schools Providing Meal Services to Students, March–April 2020**



Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data from Waves 1, 2, 3, and 4. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," April 24, 2020, <https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/>.

ranging from basic materials to programs with more directed instruction. We classified instructional plans into five categories, defined by the increasing level of directed instruction they entail. From least to most directed instructional plans, these include virtual supplemental content, instructional packets, asynchronous directed instruction, synchronous directed instruction, and virtual schools. (See the sidebar on page 8 for additional details.)

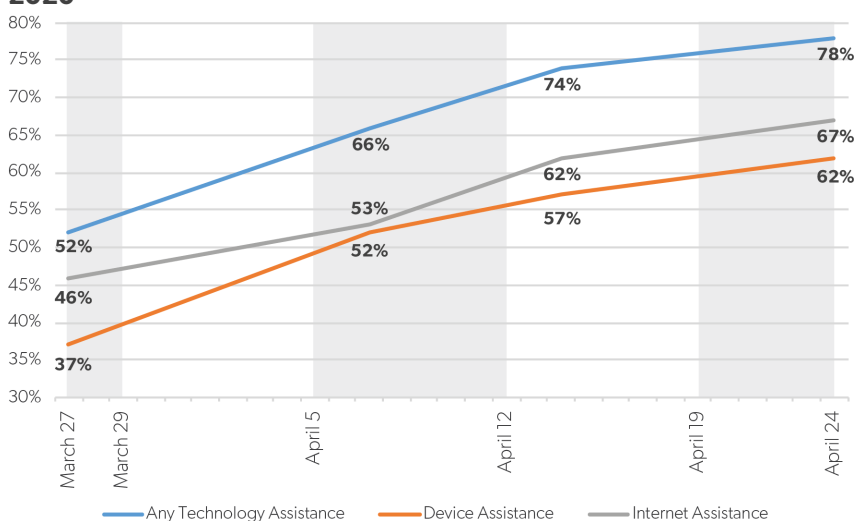
When examining districts' educational provisions, we also track whether students are broadly expected to participate or whether participation is recommended but essentially optional.<sup>17</sup> By April 24, 9 percent of schools were in districts that expressed no expectation of student participation. Sixty percent of schools had some expectations for participation, which was nearly the same as 10 days earlier (though it is well above levels reported on March 26 and April 7, which were 18 percent and 46 percent, respectively).

Taking attendance is a more formal and less frequent means of expressing expectations for student participation. As of April 24, 28 percent of schools were in districts that had established a means of taking attendance, up from 20 percent 10 days earlier. Of the remainder, 8 percent of schools explicitly said attendance would not be taken, and 64 percent of schools were in districts whose websites made no mention of plans to take attendance during remote instruction.

We also collected data on the grading policies mentioned on district websites. Almost half of schools had plans to grade students' remote work on April 24. Just over a quarter of schools were grading student

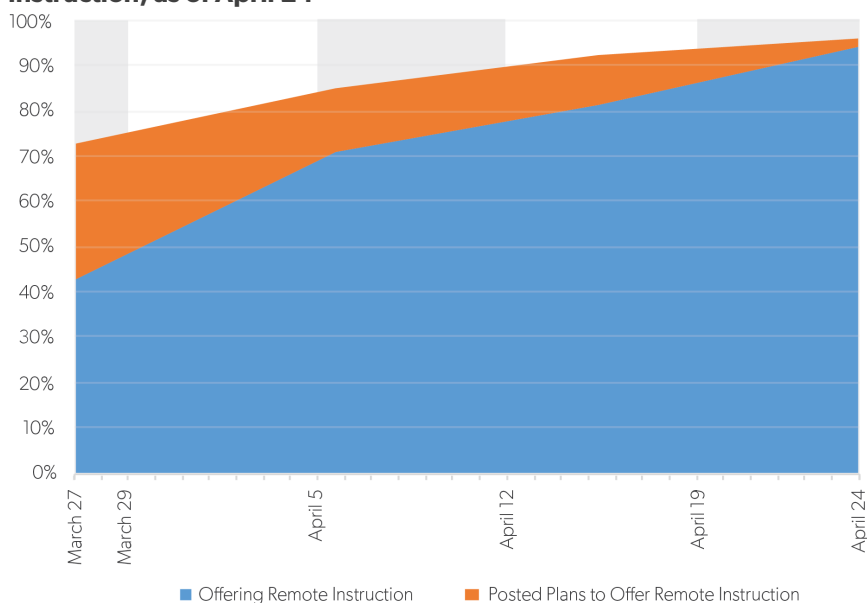
work based on their performance (26 percent), and another 23 percent were grading work based on only its completion. Fourteen percent of schools were in districts that expressly stated that, as of April 24, work would not be graded. The remaining 37 percent of schools were in districts whose websites did not discuss policies around student grades during school closure.

**Figure 6. Share of Schools Providing Technology Assistance, March–April 2020**



Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data from Waves 1, 2, 3, and 4. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," April 24, 2020, <https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/>.

**Figure 7. Share of Schools Offering (and Planning to Offer) Remote Instruction, as of April 24**



Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data from Waves 1, 2, 3, and 4. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," April 24, 2020, <https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/>.

Figure 8 displays nonexclusive percentages of different educational program offerings in place at the time of data collection, presented by expectations of participation. Sixty percent of schools are in districts that offer virtual supplemental content for students, up 20 percentage points from Wave 1. Just 2 percent

of schools offer only virtual supplemental content and no other type of more-directed instruction.<sup>18</sup>

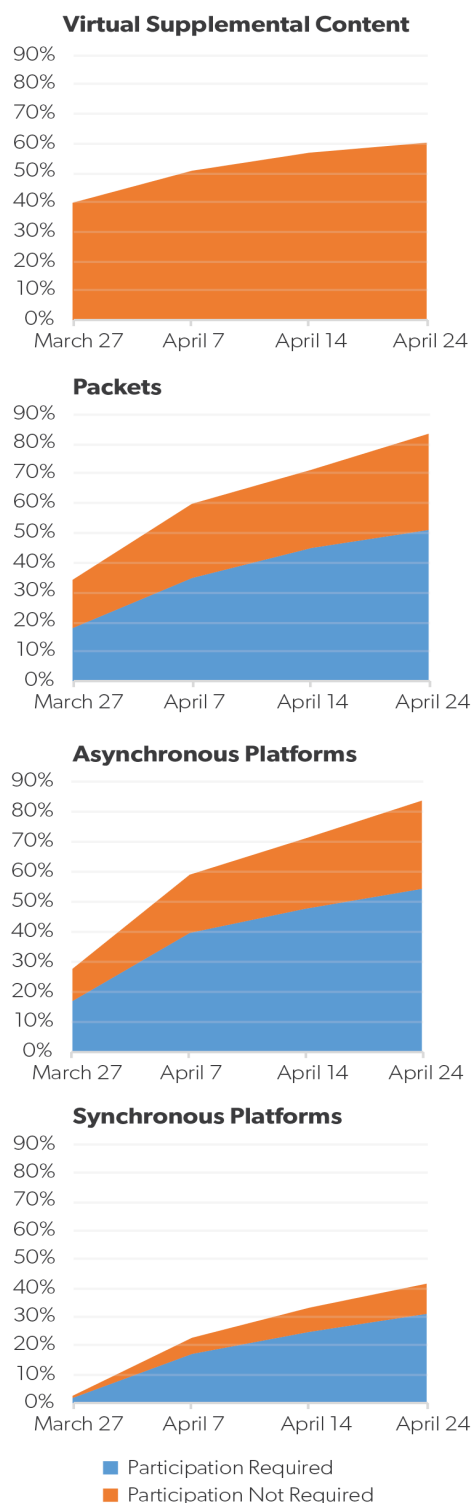
As of Wave 4, packets of resources were offered in 81 percent of schools, up from 71 percent in Wave 3, 60 percent in Wave 2, and 34 percent in Wave 1. While most of the growth in packets in Waves 1 through 3 came from schools expecting student participation, growth was evenly split in the latest round of data collection. Specifically, 30 percent of all schools offered packets without a clear expectation for participation in Wave 4, compared to 26 percent in Wave 3. Another 51 percent offered packets with expectations for participation, up from 45 percent in Wave 3.

For the first time since we began collecting C-ERLS data, the estimated percentage of schools offering asynchronous platforms was above the estimated percentage of schools offering instructional packets. Although this difference is not statistically significant, the trend over time is noteworthy. Eighty-four percent of schools are in districts that are using asynchronous web-based platforms, which allow students to engage

independently with teacher-posted material, for more directed instruction. This is nearly triple the percentage of schools offering asynchronous platforms just four weeks earlier. Thirty percent of all schools offered asynchronous platforms without



**Figure 8. Share of Schools Providing Remote Instruction and Expectations to Participate, by Type of Instruction**



Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data from Waves 1, 2, 3, and 4. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," April 24, 2020, <https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/>.

expecting participation, and 54 percent of all schools offered asynchronous platforms with expectations for student participation.

Synchronous instructional platforms, which allow students to engage directly with educators in real time, remained less common, at roughly half the frequency of packets and asynchronous platforms. By April 24, 41 percent of schools offered synchronous education platforms, up from 33, 23, and 3 percent in Waves 3, 2, and 1, respectively. The vast majority of these, 31 percent of all schools, had an expectation for participation, and just 11 percent had expressed no expectations for participation.

**Reliance on Online Technologies.** We were interested in gauging how heavily (or how minimally) districts rely on online platforms to provide remote instruction. While not a perfect proxy for educational quality, it stands to reason that districts that more heavily rely on online instruction—provided via synchronous or asynchronous platforms—allow for teaching and learning that is somewhat more similar to what students would receive in a typical classroom.

Accordingly, beginning in Wave 4, we collected information about how much districts appear to rely on online platforms versus providing packets of worksheets or other hard copy materials.<sup>19</sup> To limit the degree of subjectivity, we created three broad buckets to classify districts' remote instruction plans: those relying mostly or entirely on online platforms, those relying mostly or entirely on packets (or hard copy materials), and those in between, which are relying on online platforms and packets (or hard copy materials) in relatively equal proportions.<sup>20</sup>

The results are reported in Figure 9. Over half of districts—58 percent—rely mostly or wholly on online platforms. This percentage greatly exceeds the share of districts relying equally on online platforms and packets (22 percent) and wholly or mostly on packets (21 percent).

**One-on-One Contact with Students.** Many districts continue to explicitly encourage their teachers to make direct contact with students. On April 24, 71 percent of schools were in such districts, up from 45 percent on April 7. The most common method of direct contact, encouraged in 58 percent

## Categories of Districts' Remote Educational Provisions

We classified instructional plans into five categories, defined by the increasing level of directed instruction they entail. The first and most basic is virtual supplemental content, in which districts provide web links to outside educational content providers (such as Khan Academy) without clear direction for students using them. In this report, we do not count virtual supplemental content as remote instruction because of this lack of direction. The second is instructional packets, in which districts or schools provide static, grade-appropriate worksheets or bundles of materials that students can complete at home.<sup>15</sup>

The third and fourth categories include programs that use web-based platforms to enable asynchronous or synchronous directed instruction. Asynchronous directed instruction uses web-based platforms that allow schools or teachers to push out updated resources and assignments to students who are logged in to the platform and allow students to return completed work. These could include sites by outside providers, such as Google Classroom, and district and school websites.<sup>16</sup> Synchronous directed instruction includes platforms that allow “live” (but not in-person) instruction to occur, in which students and teachers participate at the same time using conferencing systems such as Zoom or Google Hangouts.

The fifth category is the possibility that schooling is transferred to a separate independent virtual school, with its own independent and preexisting curriculum.

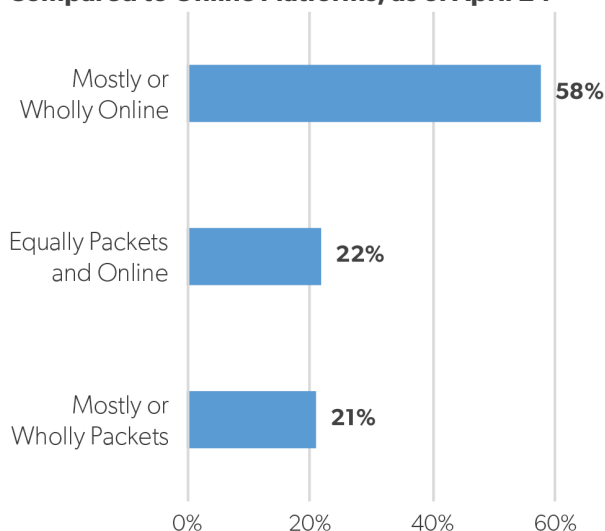
of schools, was email communication between teachers and students.

Thirty-five percent of schools encouraged teachers to use asynchronous web-based platforms as a means for direct communication, and in 28 percent of schools, teachers are encouraged to schedule virtual office hours for students to contact them. In 22 percent of schools, phone calls were encouraged for direct

contact. Forty percent of schools in Wave 4 encouraged teachers to contact students through multiple means.

In addition to these means of direct contact, students also had direct contact with teachers through synchronous education platforms, available in 41 percent of schools. Whether through synchronous platforms or one-on-one contact, by April 24, about three in four students were in districts encouraging personal contact between students and teachers, up from two in four schools that did so on April 7.

**Figure 9. Share of Schools Relying on Packets Compared to Online Platforms, as of April 24**



Note: Categories are mutually exclusive. The 10 districts that do not yet offer remote instruction (or offer only virtual supplemental content) are excluded from this figure. These percentages are out of 240 districts, rather than the entire set of 250.

Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," April 24, 2020, <https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/>.

## Conclusion

At the initial onset of COVID-19, it was commonly assumed that school closures would be temporary. Indeed, many districts simply extended their spring break period, hoping the virus would pass by the time students returned from break. In hindsight, these hopes were unrealistic, and now it is clear that few—if any—schools will reopen during the current academic year given the continued threat of COVID-19.

By late April, practically all schools offered some type of remote instruction, and the majority of schools were beyond the halfway point of scheduled building closures—meaning they are now closer to the end of their academic year than they are to the date in which buildings closed.

During this time, some schools have done little to update or change their plans for remote learning, while others have continued to refine and develop their remote programs. Specifically, some districts



have moved from their initial programs of remote instruction to their second—and for some their third—“phase” of remote instruction, meaning that instructional platforms and the associated expectations for participation, attendance, and academic rigor have increased both across and within districts as closure times have lengthened.

Other districts, however, appear to be throwing in the towel. A small group of districts—6 percent, as of April 24—have already announced that they

plan to end the school year early, thus turning all attention toward reopening in the fall. It remains to be seen if more schools will choose to follow suit or if districts will stick to their current plan to teach the rest of the academic year remotely and end on the original date that the year was scheduled to end. The fifth C-ERLS data collection, scheduled for May 6 through 8, will continue to monitor the state of the nation’s schools during this pandemic, and we will update the findings in this report soon.

## **Acknowledgments**

We are tremendously grateful to AEI’s education and domestic policy teams, who supported this research at a rapid pace while working remotely. Aleida Baumgartner, Brendan Bell, Cade Grady, Abby Guidera, RJ Martin, Matt Rice, Peyton Roth, Jess Schurz, Olivia Shaw, Sidney Sonck, Valerie Truong, Hannah Warren, Lexi West, and David Wilde provided outstanding research assistance in gathering and processing data for this report. In addition, this report would not exist without the tireless efforts of Jess Schurz, who has skillfully managed the project from start to finish. Of course, the views expressed in this report are the authors’ alone, and we take full responsibility for any errors that remain.

## **About the Authors**

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## Appendix A. Additional Questions and Data Collection

The following sections describe additional information that we gathered during the fourth wave of C-ERLS data collection. Specifically, we present findings by school level and district size. In addition, we provide more details about specific technologies and internet accommodations used in schools. Lastly, we describe how schools are approaching their responsibilities to serve specific student populations, such as English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities.

**Do School Districts' Efforts Differ Across School Levels?** Districts could differentiate the educational platforms they offer to elementary, middle, and high schools. For instance, middle and high schools may adopt synchronous or asynchronous platforms more easily than elementary schools do because older students are better able to log in to and negotiate more complex systems with less supervision at home. Therefore, C-ERLS disaggregates several data elements to capture districts whose programs differed across school level (elementary, middle, and high school).

For all three—platforms, packets, and asynchronous and synchronous instruction—there were small differences across levels, as has been seen in earlier waves. The lack of differences in district offerings does not mean that their use at each level is necessarily similar, as the length of time or frequency of actual use is not clearly reflected on district websites with any reliability. In Wave 4, 80 percent of elementary schools offered packets, slightly above the percentage of high schools and middle schools, at 78 and 77 percent, respectively, well within the margin of error for our survey. Differences for asynchronous instruction were almost as small, but the differences were in the opposite direction, with 81 percent of middle schools and high schools offering them, compared to 76 percent of elementary schools. Percentages for synchronous platforms were identical.

**What Online Platforms Are Districts Using for Asynchronous and Synchronous Instruction?** We gathered data on the specific types of asynchronous and synchronous platforms that schools are adopting to identify if certain platforms, programs, and methods are more common than others. This might be helpful for other educators and school leaders who are still determining the types of remote instruction they plan to offer.

Of schools offering asynchronous instruction, about 44 percent of schools offered more than one platform, with about 18 percent using three or more. Google Classroom is, by far, the most common platform, with 55 percent of all schools in districts whose websites mentioned Google Classroom. Schools' or districts' own websites were the next most common platforms, in use in 30 percent of schools. Canvas was the third most common platform, used in 13 percent of schools.

Of districts offering synchronous instruction on April 24 (41 percent of all schools), Zoom was the most common platform offered on district websites. Zoom was used in about 24 percent of schools in Wave 4, and Google Hangouts/Google Meet was the second most common, mentioned for 18 percent of schools. About 9 percent of schools offered other synchronous platforms.

**Do Districts' Responses Vary by District Size?** Districts of different sizes may have different capacities to employ specific educational services in response to COVID-19 closures. For instance, small districts might have limited resources or infrastructure to rapidly adjust to the pandemic. Similarly, large districts might be challenged to develop unified or piecemeal plans that provide services across all their schools. Therefore, we sorted the responses of the 250 districts in our sample into three groups by size, measured by their number of schools.

We defined small districts as those with six or fewer operational schools. Medium districts have between seven and 24 operational schools. Lastly, large districts are defined as having 25 or more operational schools. This divides our sample into three groups that are roughly equal in size: 35 percent of schools are in small districts, 35 percent of schools are in medium districts, and 30 percent of schools are in large districts.

*Meals.* The estimated percentage of schools in small districts offering meals was again lower than the rate of medium and large districts. An estimated 87 percent of schools in small districts offered meals by April 24, up

from 78 percent by April 7. Comparatively, 99 percent of medium and 100 percent of large districts offered meal services by April 24.

Daily and multiday meal pickup were the most common distribution mechanisms, available in 60 and 58 percent of schools, respectively. Schools in smaller districts offered both kinds of meal pickup less frequently, with 48 percent offering daily pickup, compared to 69 percent in both medium and large districts. In Wave 4, 48 percent of small districts offered multiday pickup, compared to 65 percent in medium and large districts, respectively.

Districts of different sizes provided meal delivery services—which included delivery via busses or drop-offs at students' homes—in similar percentages. Specifically, meal delivery was available in 38, 32, and 27 percent of schools in small, medium, and large districts, respectively.

*Participation.* The percentage of schools in large districts that expected participation was higher than percentages for small and medium districts. The share increased to 69 percent in Wave 4, up from 65 and 57 percent in Waves 3 and 2, respectively. In Wave 4, 62 and 52 percent of schools in small and medium districts, respectively, expected participation—basically unchanged since the previous wave.

*Attendance.* Large districts were more likely than small and medium-sized districts to mention attendance, take attendance, and explicitly not take attendance during remote instruction. Fifty-one percent of schools in large districts mentioned attendance, with 40 percent taking attendance, up 8 percent from Wave 3, and an unchanged 11 percent explicitly not taking attendance. Percentages for medium-sized districts were relatively lower despite substantial growth over the previous 10 days, with 32 percent mentioning attendance (up from 20 percent), consisting of 26 percent taking attendance and 7 percent explicitly not taking attendance. Twenty-five percent of schools in small districts mentioned attendance, with 18 percent taking attendance and just 7 percent explicitly not taking attendance.

*Grades.* Large districts are more likely to mention grading policies on their websites, which includes if and how schools will handle scoring homework assignments for the remainder of the school year. About 64 percent of schools in large districts have posted plans for grading in Wave 4, while only 43 percent and 42 percent of small and medium districts, respectively, have done so. Of the remainder, modest percentages explicitly decided to not grade student work, including 14 percent of schools in large districts and 19 and 10 percent of schools in medium and small districts, respectively.

The 64 percent of schools in large districts that were grading work consisted of 38 percent grading remote work based on performance—up from 31 percent in Wave 3—and 26 percent grading based on completion. Of the schools in small and medium districts, 20 and 21 percent, respectively, were grading work based on performance (each 5 percentage points higher than Wave 3), while 23 percent of schools in small districts and 20 percent in medium districts were grading based on completion.

*Instruction, Overall and by Type.* We found that higher percentages of schools in large districts had offered remote instruction plans by April 24. The percentage of schools in large districts offering remote instruction was 99 percent, higher than in both small and medium districts, at 91 and 92 percent, respectively.

For specific instructional offerings, we again found more schools in large districts listed virtual supplemental content on their district websites. By April 24, 77 percent of schools in large districts listed virtual supplemental content on their district websites, compared to 48 and 57 percent for schools in medium and small districts, respectively. The percentage of schools in districts offering only virtual supplementary content and no other plans was just 2 percent. We find that schools in small, medium, and large districts offer more directed methods of instruction at generally equal rates. Seventy-seven percent of schools in large districts provided students with packets, compared to 84 and 81 percent, respectively, in small and medium districts.

Of districts that provide asynchronous instruction, we found roughly equal increases across small, medium, and large districts. Seventy-six percent of schools in small districts offered asynchronous platforms, up from 62 percent in Wave 3, but still lower than medium and large districts, which had asynchronous platforms in 84 and

91 percent of districts, respectively. Synchronous platforms grew in all districts and were offered in 54 percent of schools in large districts, compared to 38 percent in medium districts and 35 percent in small districts.

**Technology and Internet Accommodations.** Schools are finding new and creative ways to provide remote instruction to students, but they also have to ensure all students have devices and internet access. As of 2016, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that 89 percent of US households had a computer and 82 percent had internet access.<sup>21</sup>

Seventy-eight percent of schools are in districts that mentioned plans to offer any type of technological assistance, including help with devices and internet access, just above the 74 percent in Wave 3. Sixty-two percent of districts mentioned plans to provide devices to students who are otherwise unable to access online instruction. Of these, the three most common specific devices were Chromebooks (36 percent of all schools), generic laptops (19 percent of all schools), and iPads (11 percent of all schools). Additionally, some districts listed that they would provide more than one type of device, such as Chromebooks or iPads, which included 10 percent of schools.

Similarly, many districts recognize that students may not have internet access at home and thus are discussing and implementing plans to address this challenge. By April 24, approximately 67 percent of schools were in districts that mentioned on their website the challenge of unequal access to internet, slightly more than in Wave 3 (62 percent) but well above Wave 2 (53 percent). The majority of these, including 38 percent of all schools, offered corporate plans for discounted or free internet access, while some provided Wi-Fi hot spots to families (including 24 percent of schools).

**Special Education and ELL Students.** Even in the middle of a pandemic, schools continue to have a responsibility to serve all students, including ELLs and those who participate in special education programs. Accordingly, we are interested in documenting how and if schools design plans to serve these specific types of students.

By April 14, 48 percent of schools were in districts that had mentioned the specific needs of students in special education programs, up from 20 percent in Wave 1. The vast majority of these—41 percent of all schools—were in districts that did not mention limiting special education services, while just 7 percent of schools were in districts that discussed limitations on the special education services they could provide. Smaller percentages of schools were in districts whose websites mentioned services for ELLs. ELL service limitations were mentioned in districts containing 2 percent of all schools, while 28 percent discussed ELL services without mentioning limitations.

## Appendix B. Comparing School- and District-Level Estimates

Table B1 presents the school- and district-weighted percentages for the main findings described in the report. Visit the AEI website for a detailed description of the methodology and weighting process.

**Table B1. School- and District-Weighted Percentages**

	School-Weighted Estimates	District-Weighted Estimates
<b>Closures</b>		
% Closed	100%	100%
% District Closed First	42%	43%
% Tentative Plans to Reopen, as of April 14	8%	9%
% Closed for Remainder of School Year	92%	91%
<b>Food Services</b>		
% with Plan for Offering Meals on District Website	95%	86%
% Offering Daily Meal Pickup	60%	54%
% Offering Multiday Meal Pickup	58%	52%
% Offering Meal Delivery	32%	36%
<b>Technology Assistance</b>		
% Mentioning Device Support	62%	49%
% Mentioning Internet Support	67%	47%
<b>Educational Programs</b>		
% Offering Virtual Supplemental Content	60%	47%
% Currently Offering Packets	81%	79%
% Currently Offering Asynchronous Instruction	84%	73%
% Currently Offering Synchronous Instruction	42%	32%
% Relying Mostly or Wholly on Packets	21%	29%
% Relying on Both Online Platforms and Packets	22%	18%
% Relying Mostly or Wholly on Online Platforms	58%	53%
<b>Expectations</b>		
% Expected Participation	60%	56%
% Taking Attendance Remotely	28%	19%
% Grading Student Work	48%	41%
% Grading for Performance	26%	16%
% Grading for Completion	23%	24%

Source: Authors' calculations using C-ERLS data. For more information, visit American Enterprise Institute, "COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS)," April 24, 2020, <https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/>.

## Notes

1. Sonali Kohli and Howard Blume, “California Could Begin New School Year as Early as July, Gov. Newsom Says,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 28, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-04-28/coronavirus-schools-opening-july>.
2. We selected 250 school districts randomly and proportional to size, with size defined as the number of operational schools in the district. The sampling frame consisted of regular school districts in all 50 states and DC with at least one operational school, as listed in the universe district file from the National Center for Education Statistics’ Common Core of Data from the 2017–18 school year.
3. Percentages for school districts can be calculated with the weights available on the complete dataset, but not from the single wave spreadsheets. Raw percentages computed from the single-wave spreadsheet do yield estimates on the percentage for schools. Variance estimates require additional analysis using the complete dataset, which is available upon request.
4. Even more specifically, public schools in the sample reflect all schools in regular school districts in all 50 states and DC that had operational schools as reported in the 2017–18 district universe data file from the Common Core of Data, collected by the National Center for Education Statistics.
5. To request the latest data, contact Jessica Schurz at [Jessica.Schurz@aei.org](mailto:Jessica.Schurz@aei.org).
6. American Enterprise Institute, “COVID-19 Education Response Longitudinal Survey (C-ERLS),” April 24, 2020, <https://www.aei.org/covid-19-education-response-longitudinal-survey-c-erls/>.
7. With previous reports referred to as “Wave 1,” “Wave 2,” and “Wave 3,” respectively. For the first report, see Nat Malkus, Cody Christensen, and Lexi West, “School District Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Round 1, Districts’ Initial Responses,” American Enterprise Institute, April 7, 2020, <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/school-district-responses-to-the-covid-19-pandemic-round-1-districts-initial-responses/>.
8. By May 4, 38 states of schools in our sample—Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, District of Columbia, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin—had announced statewide closures for the year, while six—California, Florida, Idaho, Kentucky, Maine, and South Dakota—had recommended closure for the year. See *Education Week*, “Map: Coronavirus and School Closures,” May 4, 2020, <https://www.edweek.org/ew/section/multimedia/map-coronavirus-and-school-closures.html>.
9. We measure the length of time it took between when school buildings initially closed and our Wave 4 data collection and the time after the data collection to their currently scheduled end of the academic year.
10. Nat Malkus and Cody Christensen, “School District Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Round 3, Plans for a Remote Finish,” American Enterprise Institute, April 27, 2020, <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/school-district-responses-to-the-covid-19-pandemic-round-3-plans-for-a-remote-finish>.
11. Note that each of these changes is within the margin of error. However, since Waves 1, 2, and 3 capture data on the same sample of 250 public school districts, these changes reflect real changes in the sample.
12. Districts with existing one-to-one device programs may not be included in this percentage.
13. In Wave 4, districts that had no clear date for the start of remote instruction on their websites and were categorized as planning to provide remote instruction were rechecked to confirm remote instruction was provided as of April 24. We confirmed remote instruction was in place for 14 districts and, without specific start dates, recorded each district’s remote start dates as April 24.
14. For instance, in a national survey of teachers, *Education Week* found that far higher percentages of teachers were participating in synchronous platforms than our survey captured from districts’ offerings on their websites. Holly Kurtz, “National Survey Tracks Impact of Coronavirus on Schools: 10 Key Findings,” *Education Week*, April 10, 2020, <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/04/10/national-survey-tracks-impact-of-coronavirus-on.html>.
15. Packets include worksheets or bundles of work that are provided electronically or via hard copy.
16. The distinction between packets and asynchronous platforms is that packets are single compilations of materials to be completed over time, whereas asynchronous platforms allow for continual updating and the transfer of work to and from students.
17. By “expected to participate,” we do not mean schools would not accept common extenuating circumstances but that they communicated a general expectation for participation. Those without an expressed participation issued the platform as an option, with the hope of participation and the possibility of expected participation in the future.
18. Schools that provide only virtual supplemental content and no other form of remote instruction are not counted as offering remote instruction, since virtual supplemental content is less directed and almost always optional for students. By “more-directed” instruction, we mean asynchronous and synchronous platforms, which are more directed than virtual supplemental content or packets are.
19. Packets and worksheets that are provided electronically are still counted as hard copy packets. Many schools that provide digital packets also provide a hard copy alternative that is either mailed, delivered, or available for pickup at school sites. Only assignments that are included within synchronous or asynchronous platforms are included for relying on online platforms.



20. Remote learning plans are divided into one of these three mutually exclusive categories based on the way the district describes their remote instruction.

21. US Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, “Table 702.60. Number and Percentage of Households with Computer and Internet Access, by State: 2016,” [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17\\_702.60.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_702.60.asp).

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